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AUTHOR Aviles, Christopher B.
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ABSTRACT

The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) can be helpful in personal, career, and marriage counseling; conflict and stress management; team building; and understanding managerial and learning styles. It has great potential to be utilized in human services organizations for training purposes because it offers a way to conceptualize employee preferences as strengths and its results are non-judgmental. It helps employees understand conflicts in the workplace and in their personal lives. To help trainers determine if the MBTI is applicable in their organizations, this paper examines the conceptual background, intended purpose, and construction of the MBTI. Validity, reliability issue, cautions, and procedures for utilizing the MBTI are also considered. The best approach is to use the MBTI to help employees and supervisors in human service organizations become more aware of conflicts and agreements in the workplace. (Contains 12 references.) (JDM)

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A review of the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory: A potential Training Tool for Human Services Organizations

AUTHOR

Christopher B. Aviles, Ph.D., ACSW
Assistant Professor
Social Work Department HC-119
Buffalo State College
1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14222-1095
(716) 878 5327 (Wk)
AVILESCB@BUFFALOSTATE.EDU

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A review of the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory: A potential Training Tool for Human Services Organizations

ABSTRACT

Several measuring instruments have potential to be utilized in human services organizations. The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) can be utilized in human services organizations for training purposes because the MBTI was designed for use with healthy individuals. Also, the MBTI has been successfully utilized for issues that apply to human services organizations, including personal, career and marriage counseling, conflict and stress management, team building and understanding managerial and learning styles.

To help trainers determine if the MBTI is applicable in their organizations, this paper examines the conceptual background, intended purpose, and construction of the MBTI. Also examined are validity and reliability issues, cautions, procedures for utilizing the MBTI and ordering information.

TITLE

A review of the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory: A potential Training Tool for Human Services Organizations

Introduction

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is perhaps one of the most popular measures of personality available today. Over 12 million people have taken the MBTI and it has been translated into at least 30 languages (Type Resources, 1998). The MBTI has been utilized for personal, career and marriage counseling, conflict and stress management, team building and understanding managerial and learning styles (Fairhurst & Fairhurst, 1995; Keirsey, 1998; Kroeger & Thuesen, 1989; Moore, Jenkins, Dietz & Feuerbaum, 1997; Pearman & Albritton, 1997). The MBTI has great potential for use in human services organizations for two reasons: it has been designed for use with healthy individuals and its results are non-judgmental.

Conceptual Background

The MBTI is based on Carl Jung's theory of personality (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985; Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995). Jung believed individuals possessed four dichotomous dimensions of personality (figure one). The four personality dimensions involve how individuals interact with the world (e.g., **E**xtraversion versus **I**ntroversion), gather information (e.g., **S**ensing versus i**N**tuition), process information (e.g., **T**hinking versus **F**eeling), and make decisions (e.g., **J**udging versus **P**erception).

The four personality dimensions are non-judgmental; i.e., they are not considered 'right or wrong,' or 'good or bad.' Healthy individuals possess both aspects within each dichotomous personality dimension. However, individuals may utilize preferred aspects

more often than non-preferred aspects. A common example to illustrate this point involves signing our names with our dominant hand. Although individuals can sign their names with their 'weak' hand, it may require greater concentration and feel uncomfortable compared to signing with the dominant hand. Similarly, healthy individuals possess all the personality aspects suggested by Jung, but individuals may prefer using one aspect rather than another because it feels more comfortable or natural.

Figure 1. Myers-Briggs Type Codes with Descriptions

MBTI Code	Description of MBTI Code
Extraversion **I**ntroversion	Prefers external world of people and things to internal world Prefers internal world of ideas and feelings to external world
Sensing i**N**tuition	Prefers to gather data with the five senses Prefers to gather data by hunches and sixth sense
Thinking **F**eeling	Prefers making decisions based on logic and objective analysis Prefers making decisions based on personal factors or subjective values
Judging **P**erception	Prefers to be decisive, planned and orderly Prefers to be flexible, adaptable, and spontaneous

Note. Adapted from Type Resources. (1998). MBTI Step 1 Professional Qualifying Workshop Notebook. Gaithersburg, MD: Type Resources Press.

The MBTI was created by Isabel Myers-Briggs to help individuals recognize their preferences within four dimensions of personality. The preferences are often referred to as 'strengths' or 'gifts' in order to emphasize their non-judgmental nature. The preferences are described briefly below. This author also describes the experience of conducting MBTI seminars for various human services organizations from 1994 to the

present. Examples provided by seminar participants that demonstrate how the MBTI applies to the human services workplace also are included. The validity, reliability, information on obtaining the MBTI and its potential use in human service organizations is also described.

The Extraversion and Introversion scale of the MBTI measures an individual's source of energy and direction of focus in the world (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985; Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995; Type Resources, 1998). Individuals who prefer extraversion may have an outward focus directed to the world of people. Extraverts can be friendly, sociable, and be energized by interacting with others. Conversely, people preferring introversion may have an inward focus directed to their inner experience of the outer world. Individuals who prefer introversion may be quiet, introspective and perhaps intense or focused. Individuals who prefer introversion may enjoy privacy and become energized by contemplation, introspection, or activities involving concentration. When my MBTI workshop participants share examples of introversion and extraversion in a workplace setting, they often describe situations of workplace conflict or satisfaction. For example, participants often say that they now have greater awareness of why employees who prefer introversion may dislike working a busy reception desk or why extraverted employees may dislike sitting alone and quietly reading professional journals or working by themselves at the computer.

The Sensing and Intuition scale measures ways of perceiving and acquiring information (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985; Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995; Type Resources, 1998). A preference for sensing can mean someone enjoys gathering facts

and information with his/her five senses. Individuals who prefer sensing may like concrete, practical details and enjoy doing sequential or precise work. A preference for intuition can mean an individual may gather information with his/her sixth sense or with hunches and through seeing overall patterns and abstractions. Individuals who prefer intuition may enjoy considering possibilities and finding new or creative solutions to problems. Workshop participants who prefer sensing often relate that they enjoy doing tasks in efficient ways and often describe wanting to make the workplace function like a "well oiled machine." Conversely, individuals who prefer intuition may experience efficient routines and established procedures as repetitive or boring.

The Thinking and Feeling scale measures ways of evaluating information (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985; Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995; Type Resources, 1998). A thinking preference can mean an individual may prefer to make decisions based on facts, evidence and objective analysis. Employees who prefer thinking may focus on fairness over compassion and may be critical of coworkers' ideas without intending to. Individuals with a preference for feeling may first consider how facts, evidence and decisions will affect others. Individuals who prefer feeling often enjoy harmony in personal and work relationships and may value compassion over objectivity. Employees who prefer thinking, in contrast, may value objectivity and truth over compassion. Workshop participants' often characterize this personality dimension as involving "the head and the heart." Often, employees who prefer feeling note that how something is said to them in supervision for example, is as important as what is said. Alternatively,

employees who prefer thinking may respond more to the message than how the message is delivered (e.g., "just say what's on your mind.").

The Judging and Perception scale measures a preference for making decisions and interacting with their environment (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985; Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995; Type Resources, 1998). Individuals who prefer judging may enjoy structure, order, specific plans and decisiveness in their work and personal lives. People with a preference for judging also may enjoy working on projects to their completion. People who prefer perceiving, in contrast, may enjoy being flexible, adaptable, spontaneous, and working on several open-ended projects as opposed to one single project. Workshop participants often note that the Judging/Perception scale is often apparent in workflow and time management issues. For example, employees who prefer judging often say they try to complete projects ahead of schedule to avoid stress. Conversely, employees who prefer perceiving may delay completing projects in order to keep all options open and because they may enjoy the stress or 'excitement' of working toward a last minute deadline.

As Isabel Myers-Briggs noted, MBTI preferences are not good or bad and individuals may be required by situations to utilize all the preferences. However, conflict may or dissatisfaction may occur if employees must continually utilize their least preferred or least developed functions.

Description of Instrument

The MBTI is a self report instrument that takes about 25 minutes to complete and contains 126 multiple choice type items (forced choice format) written at the 7th grade

reading level (form G). The MBTI measures, or more properly, sorts individuals based on preferences within four dichotomous personality aspects, often called 'codes.' The MBTI codes yield a four-letter 'type' that suggests an individual's preference in four aspects of personality (e.g.,
extraversion or introversion; sensing or intuition; thinking or feeling; judging or perception). The MBTI produces 16 different combinations of four-letter codes.

The MBTI also yields a numerical score for each letter code that indicates the relative strength of each of the four preferences. A score from 1 to 9 indicates a slight preference for a code while a score of 41 or higher indicates a very clear preference. The assumption of the numerical score is that as the score or strength of the preference increases, individuals utilize that preference more frequently. Similarly, as the numerical score decreases, individuals may not have a clear or strong preference and utilize both codes within a dichotomy. Often, workshop participants with low preference scores say that both codes (e.g., Extraversion/Introversion) describe them. Alternatively, participants with strong preferences often say that code preference does indeed describe them.

Intended Use

The MBTI was created to help individuals increase their self-awareness especially as applied to their roles in higher education, business and industry, employee assistance programs, and social work education programs (Aviles, 2001; Kroeger & Thuesen, 1989; Fairhurst & Fairhurst, 1995; Moore, Jenkins, Dietz & Feuerbaum, 1997). The MBTI has great potential for training and development in human services

settings because the MBTI characterizes personality preferences as strengths or 'gifts' and does not measure sickness or pathology.

Similarly, the strengths of each code preference are often required in workplace settings. For example, employees who prefer intuition may easily see the overall picture or grand scheme, while sensing employees may easily see details. However, the overall picture does not reveal the tasks and subtasks needed to reach the objective and a detailed task analysis does not reveal if tasks are consistent with an agency's mission. For healthy functioning, an agency (and also individuals) may need the strengths of each code for different tasks.

The MBTI also can provide a framework for identifying workplace conflicts. Participants in my MBTI workshops often report having greater understanding of why employees who prefer extraversion may, for example, feel energized after working at a fast pace with people all day, while an employee who prefers extraversion may feel drained or 'peopled out' from the same activity. Similarly, workshop participants often provide examples of workplace conflicts related to the MBTI codes. For example, an employee who prefers feeling may experience a supervisor as caustic and critical while a supervisor who prefers thinking may believe that his/her feedback is objective and accurate. Consider the potential workplace conflict if a supervisor who prefers perceiving constantly gives last minute projects to an employee who prefers judging (e.g., "stop setting me up for failure by giving me projects at the last minute!"). Or, the conflict that could occur when a judging supervisor wants progress reports from a

perceiving employee who prefers to begin projects as a deadline nears (e.g., "stop micro-managing me!").

Workshop participants also frequently provide examples from their personal lives and often note that they have greater understanding of why, at the end of a strenuous work week, for example, an extraverted partner may want to 'hit the town' while an introverted partner may want to relax at home.

Reliability

The reliability of the MBTI was established using data from several sources. The Center for the Application of Psychological Type (CAPT) has a database with over 250,000 scored MBTIs. That data, and studies done by others, are included in the MBTI manual (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985). The MBTI appears to have adequate internal consistency. Split half scores for the four codes range from a low of .83 for the introversion/extraversion scale, to a high of .87 for the judging/perception scale. The MBTI also appears to have adequate stability. Test-retest scores ranged from .71 over a two-week period to .48 over a two-year period. The MBTI manual also reports reliability scores split by gender, age, educational level, and occupation.

Validity

Validity of the MBTI is reported in detail in the MBTI Manual (Briggs-Myers & McCaully, 1985). The validity of the MBTI was established by correlating MBTI scores with results from several personality measures and vocational interest inventories such as the Jungian Type Survey and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (Campbell & Hansen, 1981; Wheelwright, Wheelwright, & Buehler, 1964). The MBTI showed

moderate and statistically significant correlations consistent with the personality constructs measured by the other instruments. Behavioral validation was established by statistically significant correlations found between MBTI scores and specific behaviors indicative of MBTI constructs (Devito, 1985). Statistically significant correlations also were found between MBTI results and a respondent's self-assessment of his/her MBTI type.

Obtaining the MBTI

The MBTI is available from Consulting Psychologists Press (800-624-1765; http://www.mbti.com/). An MBTI preview kit (form M) costs about $22.00. There are three scoring options. A completed MBTI can be sent to Consulting Psychologists Press and a profile will be mailed back. The MBTI also can be manually scored, and one version can be self-scored. A preview package that includes 10 prepaid mail-in scoring Booklet/Answer Sheets costs about $117. All materials for manual scoring costs about $200 (answer/report sheets must be replenished). To purchase the MBTI you must have graduate coursework in tests & measurements from a psychology or education department, or have completed MBTI training. MBTI qualifying programs are offered through Type Resources (800-456-6284; http://www.type-resources.com/); the Center for Applications of Psychological Type (800-777-2278; http://www.capt.org/) and, Otto Kroeger Associates (703-591-6284; http://www.typetalk.com). MBTI training ranges from a 2-day ($395) to 5-day format ($990) and is conducted around the country.

Procedures for Utilization

Utilizing the MBTI for training in human service organizations requires that the MBTI be completed prior to a workshop because the MBTI must be scored manually by a trainer or sent to Consulting Psychologists Press for scoring. The trainer should communicate to employees that the MBTI does not measure pathology and that the results are kept strictly confidential. Employees must be given the option of completing the MBTI or not, and of sharing their MBTI type or keeping it confidential. The trainer may provide participants with reading materials prior to a workshop. The materials can be as extensive as a bibliography or as simple as the introductory handouts provided with MBTI training.

MBTI workshops generally deal with understanding the MBTI codes so participants can understand their MBTI results. A trainer can then address specific issues related to the needs of the agency or team. Alternatively, a trainer may address more general issues related to improving workplace communication, preventing burnout and identifying workplace conflict.

Cautions

A caution when utilizing the MBTI is not to equate personality preference with skill levels. For example, an employee with a strong preference for extraversion may enjoy working at a busy reception desk but not be highly skilled at it. Thus, both MBTI preferences and employee skill levels must be considered when attempting to match work tasks with preferences. Matching or shifting workplace tasks based on employee strengths means a supervisor must be aware of a workers MBTI preference, the nature

of the work task, and the possibility of shifting tasks based on employee strength. For example, if two employees are equally skilled, a supervisor could consider giving reception duties to the employee who prefers extraversion and meticulous detailed projects to the employee who prefers sensing. Although both employees may have successfully handled the job, one employee may actually enjoy it more than the other and complete the task effortlessly while the other expends greater energy if the task involves his/her least preferred aspect. Delegating work tasks based on MBTI preferences may be unacceptable in agencies where employees are expected to perform everything in a job description.

Identifying workplace conflicts with the MBTI does not resolve them. For example, consider an agency where a perceiving manager constantly gives last minute projects that have sat on a desk for weeks to a judging worker who needs time to do thorough work. Should the solution involve having the perceiving manager distribute work tasks earlier to take advantage of the strengths of his/her judging employee, or should the judging employee learn to work faster? Still, identifying workplace conflicts is a necessary prerequisite to solving them.

Conclusion

The MBTI has great potential to be utilized in human service organizations because it offers a way to conceptualize employee preferences as strengths and understand why the workplace needs employees with all eight preferences. Participants in my workshops repeatedly say the MBTI has helped them identify and better understand conflicts in the workplace and in their personal lives. With time

limited workplace seminars, perhaps the best approach is to use the MBTI to help employees and supervisors in human services organizations become more aware of conflicts and agreements in the workplace. The MBTI can help accomplish this, and perhaps much more.

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